



Aleksandar

from

Oakville Trafalgar

to

Japan

"I am taking boxing pretty seriously"

I think if there is one thing that every exchange student can agree on it is that time is sped up while abroad. The last 6 months have passed by so quickly it feels surreal. These monthly reports are essentially the only thing that give me enough time to sit down and reflect on my exchange which is something much needed. Since my last BeaverTale, much has changed and all for the better.

My host family I have been with for some time now has been one of the best things of my exchange thus far and will most likely remain that way. The friendship we have developed is so sincere and genuine it is something that I truly appreciate. They treat me as if I am their own son; always helping me pursue my goals and trying to help me be the best I can be. I have gotten into boxing and I am fortunate to be living in one of the best areas for this sport. My city is recognized as one of the best in the Northern region of Japan. Specifically the high school I have recently been invited to, Mizusawa Kogyo, it is one of the best and has trained boxers who are now professional. I am taking boxing pretty seriously I train everyday after school from 4:00pm to 6:30pm. However, Wednesdays I have an additional 2 hour training from 7:00pm to 9:00pm and on weekends I have morning trainings usually lasting 3 hours. I fell in love with boxing as you can tell so I really enjoy my schedule and am always looking forward to my next training.

School for me has changed quite dramatically, since January I began to take my Japanese studies more seriously and since then I have improved my Japanese a ten fold. I am happy with my decision as the language barrier is no longer a problem for me. I can get by with nearly all conversations in Japanese and in general I speak very little

English. This has also bettered my friendships with my classmates as we can have conversations on things that actually matter rather than me standing there how I was a couple months back pointing and saying “それはペンです” meaning that is a pen. A real landmark moment in my time in Japan was after learning the Kanji 大 (big) and respectively 小 (little), see most toilets in Japan have two kanji written on the handles and I finally realized what it meant big flush / little flush. You have no idea how exciting it was by just looking at the character knowing what it was. However, I am nowhere near fluent and that will definitely take much more work that I am willing to put in now and after this exchange. I am eager to see how far I can get with the language by the end of my exchange.

In the second week of December we had our school trip which is something I really love about the Japanese high school system. All high schools in Japan have organized school trips, the location varying on the school but some even travel to other countries with their entire class. It is truly amazing to see such effort and organization to be put into the schools. In Japan there is a custom of the family giving money to their kid before heading out. The Japanese name for this is お餞別 meaning parting gift. I was lucky enough to receive one not just from my parents but also my grandparents and Rotary. My trip involved three major cities: Hiroshima, Kyoto, and Osaka. For my first time I got to ride a bullet train from my hometown, Mizusawa, to Hiroshima which is on the other side of Japan. We spent the most time in Hiroshima, two days, as there was much to cover from the historical aspect involving the nuclear bombing to enjoying the city for what it is today. Following we visited Kyoto which is what you first picture in your mind when you hear Japan. A very old city bearing almost entirely traditional Japanese buildings. It was nice to experience a scenery of such beauty. But they saved the best for last, Osaka. We spent all of our time at Universal Studios of Japan which is one of the coolest amusement parks I have visited. Each section of USJ was themed to a certain movie, I am not a Harry Potter fan but this indeed was my favorite section. At first I thought they filmed the movie here, it looks exactly as it does in the movie and I believe it is to scale. Hogwarts castle towers over the whole amusement park and what adds to it is that you can actually go inside which houses in my opinion the best ride of all. This four day trip was something I will never forget, I got really close with my friends and the experiences were once in a lifetime even the simple things such as staying in a traditional Japanese style hotel. Definitely the highlight of my exchange thus far.

Most recently, Valentines Day which also happens to be my birthday was so much more than I deserved. I had an amazing time and I ended up celebrating my birthday three days in a row. On Sunday the day of my birthday, my host mother and

uncle took me to the capital city of the prefecture, Morioka. This was surprisingly my first time. We went out for lunch in one of the best burger joints my taste buds have ever had the luxury to touch, Mos Burger, it is on par with The Works which is a bold statement. Afterwards we went skating at the arena which held this year's Japan's figure skating championships. This was my first time in eight years skating however you have my word I only wiped out once. It was a fun time and going skating was something well overdue. Later on we visited a science museum which included a planetarium; my host family knows me well, knowing I love science and especially planetariums. Of course we had a birthday dinner with my favorite pork cutlet, fried chicken, steak and anything else I decided to pick out of the plentiful options rested along the restaurant's table. My birthday cake was both good looking and delicious, chocolate with strawberries. After stuffing ourselves I got to open presents and we finished the night off with Pulp Fiction. The next day at school my whole class planned out a surprise party for me and it was one of the happiest moments in Japan. I really didn't expect it, it was a wonderful time. Furthermore, the following day at boxing my friends there threw me a little party and it was just as fun. Japanese people are really one of the nicest people on the planet, I recommend anyone who is cynical about humans as a whole to go visit Japan they will give you an entirely new outlook on life.

I can not stress it enough how thankful I am to all of you Rotarians. This is an experience of a lifetime and it is one where you both enjoy and learn.

The long term exchange program has helped me better myself and mature. I am truly grateful for the hard work you Rotarians and are putting in both in Canada and in Japan, it really shows and this program is something someone would dream of. Same goes with the host families that have the decency to give somebody else's kid a home. It is a group effort and in the end it pays off as a life changing experience.

Thank you.

Aleksandar

